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Sept. 14 - Sept. 20, 2001

The Treaty Has Two Faces

APIAs say the 50th anniversary of 1951 U.S.-Japan Peace Treaty is no reason to celebrate



Protestors demand Japan apologize for the atrocities committed during World War II.
Photo by Sam Chu Lin

Ethen Lieser & Sam Chu Lin

Cuiping Ni's father went to the river to wash vegetables for lunch. He was killed. Ni's mother heard the gunfire and came out of the tent. She was killed. That afternoon, during the burial of her parents, her grandfather was beaten with rifle butts until his cranium collapsed. Ni's aunt — after being repeatedly raped by the same Japanese soldiers who had killed her husband — died from complications.

Six dead. Six out of an estimated 19 to 35 million in China and countless others in 13 neighboring countries killed by the Japanese Imperial Army.

"I am a witness of this massacre and will not let the Japanese government deny what happened until the last day of my life," she said.

Two Conferences, many sides

As Ni told her story on Sept. 6 at the Global Alliance for Preserving the History of WWII in Asia event at the San Francisco

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Public Library, many attendees couldn't hold back their tears.

For those gathered in the room and many others, the historic 50th anniversary of the US-Japan peace treaty — signed in San Francisco on Sept. 8, 1951 to end World War II officially — was a day for mourning rather than celebrating.

Regarding ambiguities contained within specific articles, Professor Michael Bazylar — the vice president of the “1939” club, a Holocaust survivors association — said, “Japan continues to assert they need not recognize the claims of the victims because they are insulated from such claims by the 1951 peace treaty.”

On Sept. 7, the second day of US-Japan 21st Century Project conference — “The United States and Japan: An Enduring Partnership in a Changing World” — the former U.S. ambassador to Japan and speaker of the House Thomas Foley said, “Nothing is comparable to what happened in the Holocaust.

“We can't continue to demonize Japan,” he added, disagreeing with those who demand Japan to follow the lead of Germany's \$4.8 billion compensation for victims of World War II.

San Francisco Superior Court Judge Lillian Sing emphasized that the ordeals of “Comfort Women” and the victims of Rape of Nanking shouldn't be slighted in comparison to the unspeakable atrocities committed by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

Soon Duk Kim of South Korea, who flew to San Francisco to protest the commemoration, described her own suffering when she and other women were abducted to serve as “comfort women,” or sex slaves, to Japanese soldiers.

“There were long lines of soldiers every day,” she remembered. “We could not endure the pain. We sobbed; we wailed. Some girls climbed to high places and jumped off. Others hung themselves. They took medicine to kill themselves. The soldiers didn't care at all.”

On the same day, another conference entitled “50 Years of Denial: Japan and its Wartime Responsibilities” was held at the Radisson Miyako Hotel in Japantown. Iris Chang, the author of the best-selling book *The Rape of Nanking*, was a featured speaker.

“Throughout the week, there will be attempts to drown us out,” she said. “The top brass from Tokyo and the United States will be in town. But that will not deter us.”

Reason to Celebrate?

On the day of the treaty's signing, the others gathered at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium in San Francisco for a Gala Dinner to wrap up the three days of conferences and events commemorating the anniversary of the US-Japan Peace Treaty. But there were plenty of mixed feelings about the accomplishments of the three-day tribute.

United States' and Japanese officials praised the economic progress and friendship that had taken place between the two countries since World War II, but both emphasized no more reparations to war victims would be paid.

At a ceremony that also commemorated the U.S.-Japan security pact, Japanese Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka declared that the signing of the peace treaty "resolved all postwar settlement issues."

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell echoed many of the same feelings, but he added that the U.S. government recognizes that many Americans feel they have not been adequately compensated for their wartime suffering.

"Fifty years ago, six years after the war," he said, "it was judged here in San Francisco that it was time to bring this period to the end, and the treaty that was signed that day dealt with all future claims."

Many people disagree. Chanting "Japan Must Pay," "Remember the Nanking Massacre" and waving placards with photographs depicting Japanese war crimes, 400 demonstrators gathered outside to let their feelings be known as 2,000 guests entered San Francisco's War Memorial Opera House earlier in the day to witness the commemorative ceremony.

San Francisco Supervisor Leland Yee said he initially planned to participate, but he changed his mind.

"When the Japanese government came over to the Board of Supervisors and asked that my resolution, which called on Japan to apologize for its atrocities, be referred to committee, then I decided I would not grace this event," he stated.

During the ceremonies, Tanaka reaffirmed an apology made by Japan in the mid-1990s.

"We have never forgotten that Japan caused tremendous damage

and suffering to the people of many countries during the last war," she said. "The war has left an incurable scar on many people, including former prisoners of war."

The mention of Prisoners of War was considered a first. But some critics said Tanaka's statement was only a small "incremental step" by Japan to make an official apology. Others didn't think it was enough.

"Continually we hear about one official here, and another official there, having remorse," Yee reacted. He added she would not be satisfied until the government formally apologizes.

POW Struggle

Rep. Mike Honda, D-Calif., who co-sponsored a U.S. Prisoners of War Bill to allow former POWs to seek compensation and an apology from Japanese companies, which used them for slave labor, agreed the issue of reparations is far from over. Having spoken at both conferences and attended the gala, he says the question of POWs being included in the original peace treaty was considered, but the matter was left out.

"POWs were considered heroes," he said. "These are veterans who survived everything. They survived the Bataan Death March. They survived the hell ships of Japan. They survived almost two years at the hands of the Japanese corporations. They were tortured and made slave laborers. Now they have to survive our justice system. Give me a break. They should have their day in court."

As the celebration came to a close at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium, Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta accepted the Japan Society's Award of Honor on behalf of the Japanese American community "for fostering a better American understanding of Japan and for continuing the exchange of goodwill between the two countries."

Asked by a reporter what he thought about the controversy surrounding the conference, Mineta said, "Japanese Americans are tied to Japan by culture, but they are loyal Americans."

The former Silicon Valley congressman used the occasion to point out that Japanese Americans, serving in the Military Intelligence Service, helped to shorten the war in the Pacific by two years and helped to rebuild Japan after the war.

On the other side of the coin, U.C. Berkeley Asian American

Studies professor Ronald Takaki called for Japanese Americans to be a leading voice in this struggle, as they did during and after their internment in World War II.

“Japanese Americans need to speak out for the principle of justice for the victims of Japanese imperialism, just as they spoke out for the principle of justice in their struggle for redress in reparations from their own government.”

Kristine Ha contributed to this report.

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